IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claims 1, 2, 14 and 24 so that the claims read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) An absorbent garment comprising:

a body panel having a bodyside surface and a terminal waist edge; and

an absorbent composite having a garment-side surface, a longitudinally extending length defined between first and second terminal edges and a laterally extending width and comprising a backsheet, a topsheet and a retention portion having opposite side edges disposed between said backsheet and said topsheet, wherein said garment-side surface of said absorbent composite is connected to said bodyside surface of said body panel along at least a longitudinally extending location, and wherein said absorbent composite comprises a longitudinally extending side margin extending laterally outboard from said location and terminating in a free edge positioned laterally outboard of said location, <u>said side margin extending longitudinally from said first terminal edge,</u> wherein an entirety of said side margin positioned between said location and said free edge is unattached to said bodyside surface of said body panel, and wherein said retention portion does not form any portion of said side margin, and wherein said terminal waist edge of said body panel is longitudinally spaced from said first and second terminal edges of said absorbent composite.

2. (Currently Amended) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said absorbent composite comprises a first and second longitudinally opposed end regions, and wherein said body panel comprises a first body panel connected to said first end region and a second body panel connected to said second end region, wherein said first and second body panels each comprise terminal crotch edges that are longitudinally spaced apart, and wherein said at least said longitudinally extending location comprises at least one longitudinally extending first location and at least one longitudinally extending second location, wherein said absorbent composite is connected to said first body panel along said at least one longitudinally extending first location, and wherein said absorbent composite is connected to said second body panel along said at least one longitudinally extending second location, and wherein said side margin extends laterally outboard from each of said first and second locations <u>and extends longitudinally</u>

from said first terminal edge of said absorbent composite to said terminal crotch edge of said first body panel and from said terminal crotch edge of said second body panel to said second terminal edge of said absorbent composite.

Claim 3 (Cancelled).

4. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said side margin is formed from said backsheet.

5. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said side margin is formed from said topsheet.

6. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 5 wherein side margin comprises a first portion of said topsheet folded over a second portion of said topsheet, wherein said folded first and second portions form a folded edge defining said free edge of said side margin.

7. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 6 wherein said side margin further comprises a portion of said backsheet disposed between said first and second portions of said topsheet.

8. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said side margin is formed from said topsheet and said backsheet.

9. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said retention portion has opposite lateral side edges, and wherein said side margin extends laterally outboard from one of said side edges of said retention portion.

10. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said side margin comprises a longitudinally extending elastic element.

11. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 1 further comprising a second side margin and wherein said side margin comprises a first side margin opposite said second side margin and wherein said opposite side margins extend laterally outboard from respective sides of the absorbent composite and terminate in opposite free edges.

12. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said location is laterally spaced a first distance from said free edge at a first position and wherein said location is laterally spaced a second distance from said free edge at a second position, wherein said first distance is greater than said second distance and wherein said first and second positions are longitudinally spaced.

13. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 12 wherein said second position is closer to an end of said absorbent composite than said first position.

14. (Currently Amended) An absorbent garment comprising:

longitudinally spaced first and second body panels each having a bodyside surface and at least two substrates, each of said substrates of said first and second body panels having a terminal waist edge and a terminal crotch edge, said terminal crotch edges of said substrates of said respective first and second body panels being longitudinally spaced; and

an absorbent composite having a longitudinally extending length, a laterally extending width and longitudinally opposed first and second end regions having first and second terminal edges respectively, said absorbent composite comprising a backsheet, a topsheet and a retention portion disposed between said backsheet and said topsheet, wherein said first end region of said absorbent composite is connected to said bodyside surface of said first body panel along at least one longitudinally extending first location with said first terminal edge longitudinally spaced from said terminal waist edge of said substrates of said first body panel, and wherein said second end region of said absorbent composite is connected to said bodyside surface of said second body panel along at least one longitudinally extending second location with said second terminal edge longitudinally spaced from said terminal waist edge of said substrates of said second body panel, wherein said absorbent composite comprises a pair of laterally opposed side margins extending laterally outboard from each of said at least one first and second locations and

terminating in opposite outboard free edges positioned laterally outboard of respective ones of said at least one first and second locations, wherein an entirety of each of said side margins overlapping said first and second body panels and positioned respectively between said free edge thereof and a corresponding one of said at least one first and second locations are unattached to said bodyside surfaces of said respective first and second body panels, and wherein said retention portion does not form any portion of said side margin.

Claim 15 (Cancelled).

16. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said side margins are formed from said backsheet.

17. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said side margins are formed from said topsheet.

18. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 17 wherein each of said side margins comprises a first portion of said topsheet folded over a second portion of said topsheet, wherein said folded first and second portions form a folded edge defining said free edge of said each of said side margins.

19. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 18 wherein said each of said side margins further comprises a portion of said backsheet disposed between said first and second portions of said topsheet.

20. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said side margins are formed from said topsheet and said backsheet.

21. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said retention portion has opposite lateral side edges, and wherein said side margins extend laterally outboard from said side edges of said retention portion, respectively.

22. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said side margins each comprise a longitudinally extending elastic element.

23. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein each of said side margins has a first lateral width at a first position and a second lateral width at a second position, wherein said first and second positions are longitudinally spaced.

24. (Currently Amended) A method of providing protection against bodily exudates with an absorbent garment comprising:

providing said absorbent garment comprising first and second body panels each having a bodyside surface and at least two substrates, each of said substrates of said first and second body panels having a terminal waist edge and a terminal crotch edge, said terminal crotch edges of said substrates of said respective first and second body panels being longitudinally spaced and defining a space therebetween and an absorbent composite having a longitudinally extending length defined between first and second terminal edges and a laterally extending width and comprising a backsheet, a topsheet and a retention portion disposed between said backsheet and said topsheet, wherein said absorbent composite bridges said space between said terminal crotch edges with said first and second terminal edges of said absorbent composite disposed over at least a portion of said first and second body panels respectively with said absorbent composite connected to said bodyside surface of each of said first and second body panels along at least one longitudinally extending first and second location respectively, wherein said first and second terminal edges of said absorbent composite are longitudinally spaced from said terminal waist edges of said substrates of each of said first and second body panels respectively, wherein said absorbent composite comprises laterally opposed side margins extending laterally outboard from at least one of said at least one first and second locations, and each of said side margins terminating in a free edge positioned laterally outboard of respective ones of said at least one first and second locations, wherein an entirety of each of said side margins <u>overlapping said first and second body panels and</u> positioned respectively between said free edge thereof and a corresponding one of said at least one first and second locations are unattached to said bodyside surfaces of said respective first and second body panels<u>, and wherein said retention portion does not form any portion of said side margin</u>; and

applying said absorbent garment to a body of a user.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein at least said side margins of said absorbent composite have a bodyside surface and wherein at least a portion of said bodyside surface of said side margins is in contact with the body of the user.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein said side margins are formed from said backsheet.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein said side margins are formed from said topsheet.

28. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 27 wherein each of said side margins comprises a first portion of said topsheet folded over a second portion of said topsheet, wherein said folded first and second portions form a folded edge defining said free edge of said side margin.

29. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 28 wherein each of said side margins further comprises a portion of said backsheet disposed between said first and second portions of said topsheet.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein said side margins are formed from said topsheet and said backsheet.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein said retention portion has opposite lateral side edges, and wherein said side margins extend laterally outboard from said side edges of said retention portion, respectively.

32. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24 wherein said side margins each comprise a longitudinally extending elastic element.

33. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said absorbent composite comprises an end region overlapping said body panel, and wherein said side margin extends along only a portion of said end region of said absorbent composite overlapping said body panel.

34. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 10 wherein said elastic element extends along only a portion of said length of said absorbent composite.

35. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 34 wherein said elastic element has a length between about 5% and about 100% of said length of said absorbent composite.

36. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 13 wherein said second distance is about zero.

37. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 36 wherein said side margin is tapered from said second distance to said first distance between said second and first positions.

38. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said first and second end regions overlap said first and second body panels respectively, and wherein said side margins extend along only a portion of said first and second end regions of said absorbent composite overlapping said first and second body panels respectively.

39. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein each of said first and second end regions comprise opposite corners, and wherein at least said opposite corners of said first and second end regions are connected to said first and second body panels respectively.

40. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 22 wherein each of said elastic elements extends along only a portion of said length of said absorbent composite.

41. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 40 wherein each of said elastic elements has a length between about 5% and about 100% of said length of said absorbent composite.

42. (Withdrawn) The absorbent garment of claim 23 wherein said second lateral width is about zero at said second position.

43. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 24 wherein said absorbent composite comprises an end region overlapping said body panel, and wherein said side margins extend along only a portion of said end region of said absorbent composite overlapping said body panel.

44. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 32 wherein each of said elastic elements extends along only a portion of said length of said absorbent composite.

45. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 44 wherein each of said elastic elements has a length between about 5% and about 100% of said length of said absorbent composite.

46. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 24 wherein said absorbent composite comprises at least a pair of opposite corners connected to said bodyside surface of said body panel.

47. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 1 wherein said side margin forms an oblique angle relative to a plane defined by said body panel at said location.

48. (Previously Presented) The absorbent garment of claim 14 wherein said side margins forms an oblique angle relative to a plane defined by each of said respective first and second body panels at said at least one first and second locations.